

Ukrainian folk tale



Translated by Irina Zheleznova,

IVANKO AND DULIANA THE WISE

Illustrated by T. Silvashi



There was once a youth named Ivanko who lost his father early in life and so had to begin making his own living when still in his teens. He often went hunting and learned to use a bow and arrow well.



One day on his way back from the forest empty-handed, he met an old woman carrying a jug of milk.

"I didn't get any game today," said he to himself, "but if I can hit the old woman's jug from here it will mean that I am as good a shot as ever."



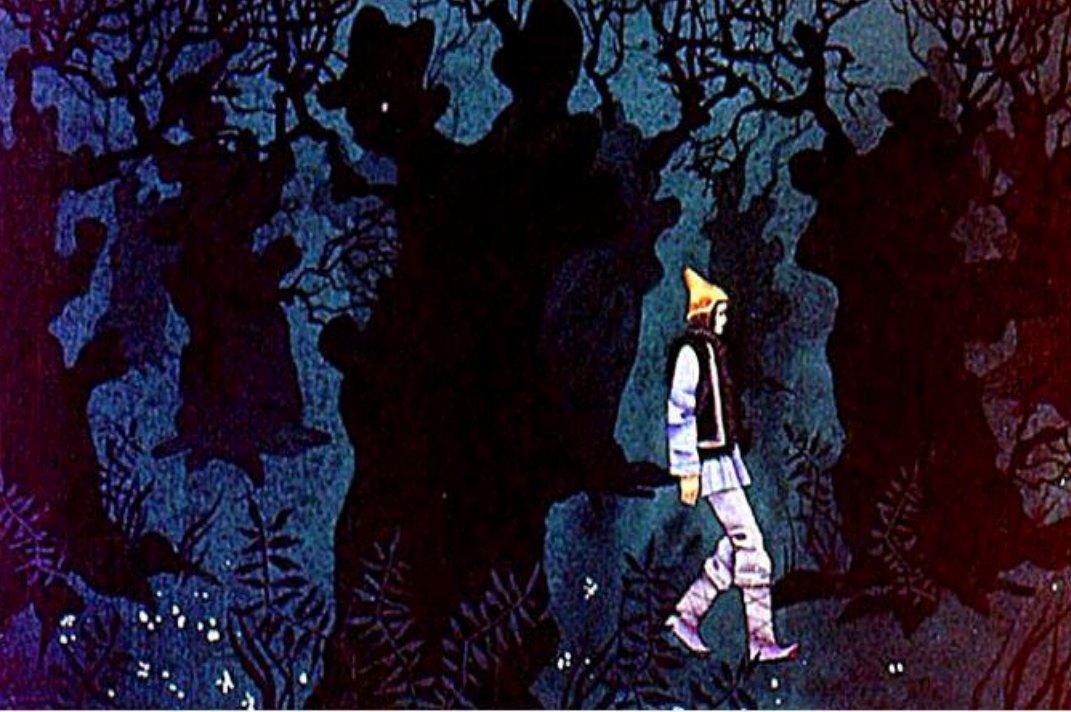
He shot an arrow, and the old woman's jug
lost one of its handles.

The old woman was very angry.

"May you only marry when Duliana the Wise
agrees to take you for a husband!" she cried.

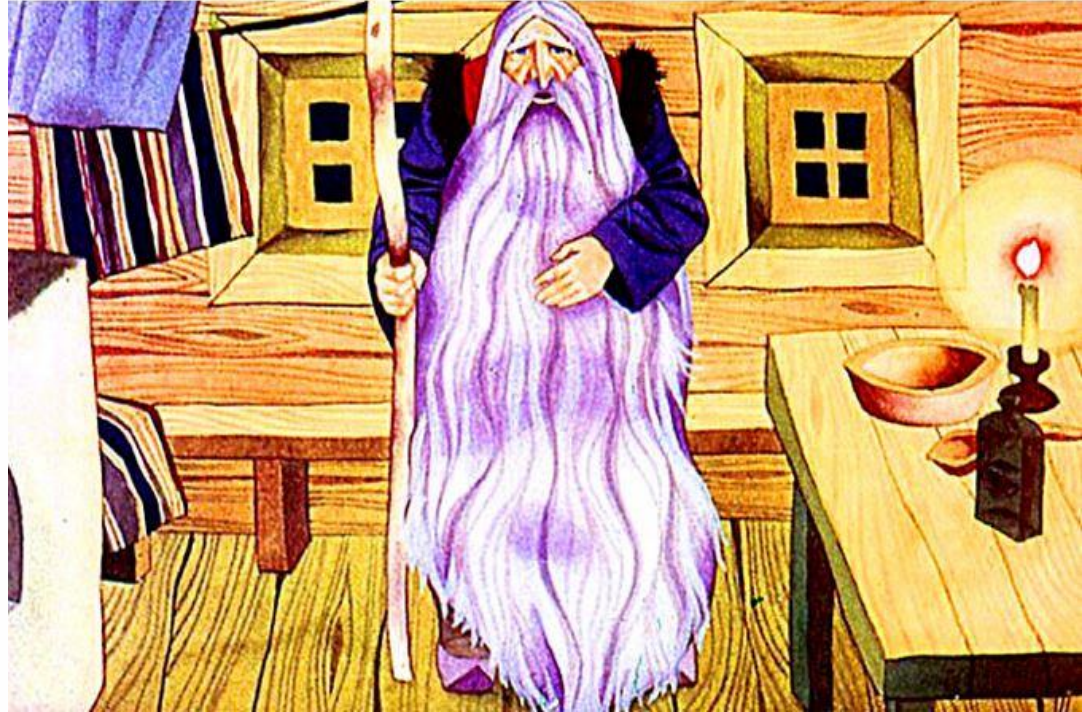


Ivanko took no notice but when the time came for him to marry, no girl would have him, though he courted many. He recalled the old dame and what she had said, and, feeling that there was no way out but to go in search of Duliana the Wise, bought himself a horse.



"I am off to seek Duliana the Wise, Mother!" said he.
"Who knows! Perhaps there is such a one somewhere."

He got on his horse and set out from home. And he rode on for such a long time that his horse dropped dead and he had to go on on foot. He came to a land where no birds fly and the sun does not shine, but he did not stop and walked on.



One day, as he was passing through a forest, he came upon a tiny hut sunk so deep into the ground that it could hardly be seen. Ivanko stepped inside and saw a little old man there with a beard so long that it trailed over the floor.



"Greetings, Grandpa!" he said.

The little old man raised his eyes and looked at him.

"Greetings to you, my son!" he rejoined. "I am two hundred and fifty years old, but I have not seen a good and polite lad like you for a long time. Where are you going?"

"I am seeking my bride, Duliana the Wise, but I do not know where to look for her," Ivanko replied. "Perhaps you can help me, Grandpa?"



"I have never heard of the maid, but I will do what I can for you," said the old man. "I will give you a ball of thread that will lead you out of this forest."



Ivanko went after the ball of thread and was soon out of the forest and in the open, with the sun shining overhead. Just ahead of him he saw a house that was twelve stories high.

Duliana the Wise was on the top floor and she saw Ivanko from a distance.



She ran down at once to meet him, greeted him joyfully, gave him some food and drink and said:

"This house belongs to the Devil of Devils who is keeping me captive. I do not want him to kill you, so I am now going to turn you into an old man. You will stay in the barn with the cows for a while, and in the evening, when the Devil of Devils returns, I will tell him that you are here looking for work."



Evening arrived, and the Devil of Devils came home. He tethered his horse and turned to Duliana.

"Who is that in the barn?" he asked.

"A poor old man. He came this morning, asked me for some food and has been tending the cows ever since. I wish you would let him stay here and work for us, for there is too much for me to do."

"Ask him to come here, I want to talk to him," said the Devil of Devils.

Ivanko came into the house, and the Devil of Devils gave him a stern look from under his heavy brows and said:

"Come, take your proper shape, old one!"



And Ivanko at once got back his proper shape.

The Devil of Devils was very angry and wanted to force him to eat some iron dumplings, for that was one of the fiendish ways he had of dealing with those he hated, but Duliana the Wise was a wise maid and said that Ivanko had already had his supper.

"Well, then, let him go to bed now, for he will have to get up soon!" said the Devil of Devils. "I will give him some work to do at midnight."

Ivanko went back to the barn, and he sat there and shook with fear, for he did not know what would become of him.

Midnight came, and the Devil of Devils called him and led him to the forest.

"Take a wooden axe and get to work!" he said. "Cut down as many spruce trees as you see ahead and behind you and then turn up the soil and plant wheat here. And mind that the wheat ripens and is reaped and threshed in one day, and that bread is made out of it and laid on the table freshly baked for me to eat in the evening. And if you don't do it you will die a terrible death!"



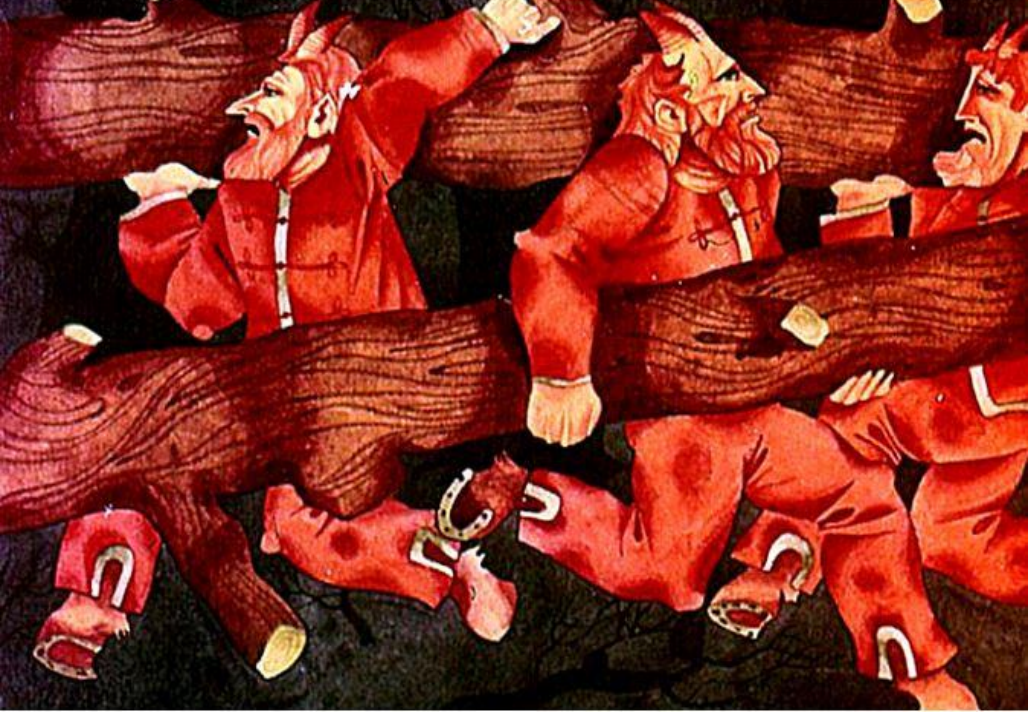
"The Devil of Devils has given me such hard work to do and so little time to do it in that a whole village could not cope with it, let alone one man without any help from anyone," said Ivanko to himself.



He picked up a wooden axe and struck a tree with it, and lo! — it broke to pieces. He sank down on the ground then and sat there with hanging head. And Duliana the Wise found him there at noon when she brought him his lunch.

"Eat your lunch, Ivanko, and don't worry," said she.

He had his lunch and she then asked him what the task was that the Devil of Devils had given him to do.



"He told me to uproot this whole forest, plant wheat here and have bread baked out of it for him to eat before evening," Ivanko said.

Duliana the Wise whistled, and the Devil of Devils' servants, demons all, came running. She told them what to do, and by evening the house was filled with the smell of freshly baked bread.



The Devil of Devils was pleased and patted Ivanko on the back.

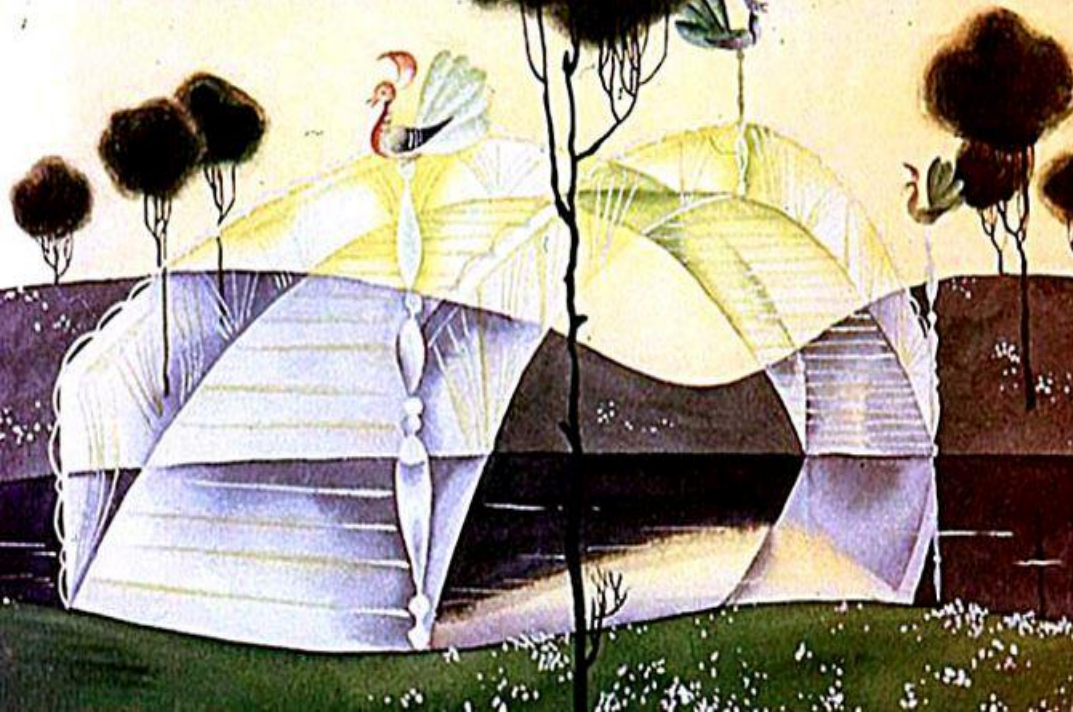
"You have done well!" he said. "And now go to bed, for I will give you another task to do at midnight."



Ivanko was less afraid now than he had been the first time, but he could not fall asleep for trying to guess what he would be asked to do.

The Devil of Devils got up in the middle of the night, and, giving Ivanko a huge leather bag, took him to the shore of a lake.

"You are to drain the lake before evening so that only dust is left on the bottom for the wind to raise, and then build a glass bridge resting on only one pile and having three red pillars on top of it across the lake bed. Three young songbirds are to sit on the tops of those three pillars and to sing to me in three different voices whenever I cross the bridge."



The Devil of Devils went away, but Ivanko did not try to drain the lake. Instead, he waited for Duliana the Wise, and when she came bringing him his lunch would not eat till he had told her what he had been asked to do. And when Duliana the Wise had heard him out she gave a whistle, and the demons came running. They were very quick, and, jumping into the lake, drilled large holes in the lake bottom. The water ran down into the ground, and where the lake had been there now was nothing but a large hollow with a dry, dusty floor. And before Ivanko had finished eating, the three young songbirds were singing on the top of the glass bridge's three red pillars.



The Devil of Devils had nothing but praise for Ivanko.

"You have shown yourself to be the best of servants," he said, "and can stay and work for me as long as you like."

Ivanko stayed with the Devil of Devils and worked for him for a long time, but one day Duliana the Wise came to see the youth and said in a whisper:

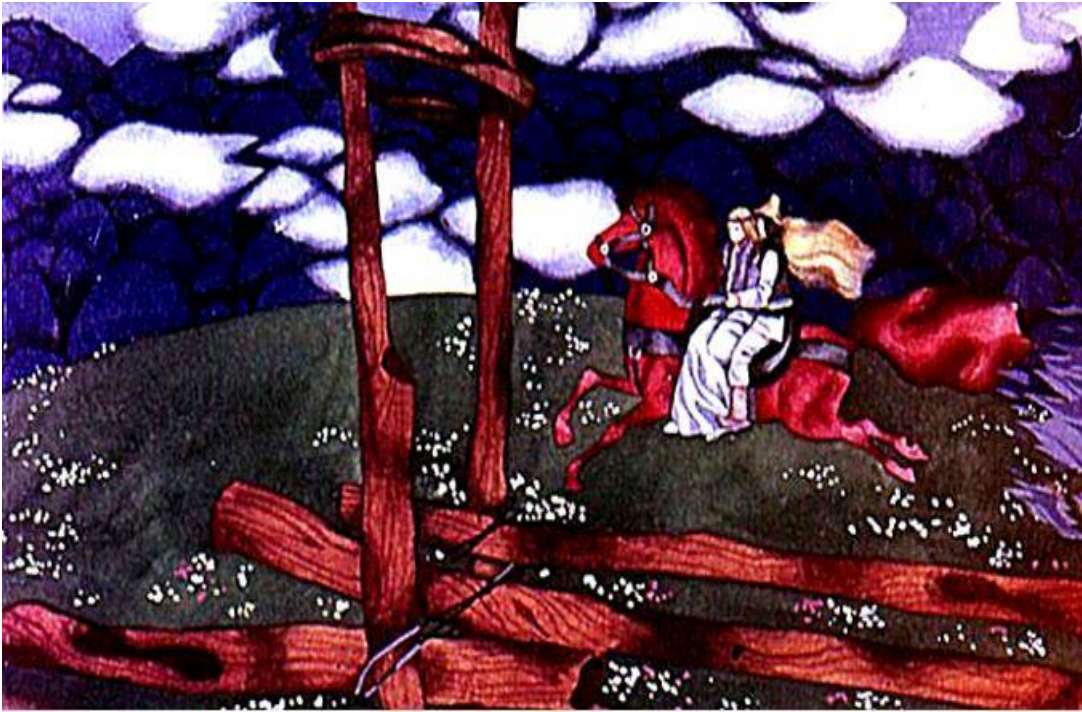
"Saddle the horses, Ivanko, and let us run away to your land!"



Ivanko saddled the horses, and away they rode, but they had not gone very far when the Devil of Devils' horse began neighing loudly. The Devil of Devils hurried home, and the horse told him that Ivanko and Duliana the Wise had run away together.

"Have I time to eat ten pots of iron dumplings, drink twelve barrels of beer and smoke twenty boxes of cigars before we go after them?" asked the Devil of Devils.

"Yes! You can eat and drink and smoke all you want," the horse replied. "They will not get away from us!"



Ivanko and Duliana the Wise rode on, and all of a sudden Ivanko cried out and said that he felt something burning him.

"Look behind you — what color is the flame that you see?" asked Duliana the Wise.

"It's blue," Ivanko replied.

"That is the Devil of Devils' horse sending its breath at us," said Duliana the Wise. "But don't worry. I will turn our horses into bushes and ourselves into rabbits, and perhaps the Devil of Devils will not know us and ride past."



But this proved to be a vain hope, for the Devil of Devils' horse knew them for what they were and warned his master about them, and the Devil of Devils at once pulled out his sword.

"Take your proper shape if you don't want me to cut you to pieces!" he cried.



Duliana the Wise did as he ordered and she and Ivanko got back their proper shape.

"I forgive you this first time, for you carried out the first task I gave you to do," said the Devil of Devils to Ivanko.



They went back to the Devil of Devils' house and lived there as before, but after a time Duliana the Wise said to Ivanko:

"Let us try and run away again! Perhaps we will be more lucky this time."

Away they rode and were on the way for three days, but when the fourth day came the Devil of Devils' horse began neighing loudly.

"Have I time to eat before we go after them?" the Devil of Devils asked him.

"Plenty of time! They'll not get away from us!" the horse replied.

The Devil of Devils ate and drank and smoked his fill, and only then did he get on his horse's back and follow them.

Ivanko and Duliana the Wise rode on, and all of a sudden Ivanko said that something was burning him.

"Look behind you — what color is the flame that you see?" asked Duliana the Wise.

"It's blue."

"That is the Devil of Devils' horse again. But do not worry. I will change our horses into a lake and you and me into ducks, and perhaps the Devil of Devils will not recognize us."



But this proved a vain hope, for the Devil of Devils' horse warned him about them, and he at once pulled out his sword.

"Come, ducks, take your proper shape or I'll cut you to pieces!" he cried.

Duliana the Wise did as he ordered, and they got back their proper shape. They spent the night in the Devil of Devils' house, and in the morning Duliana the Wise said to Ivanko:

"We had better ride faster next time!"

But Ivanko shook his head.

"I don't think we should try to run away at all any more," he said. "The Devil of Devils forgave me both times because I coped with the two tasks he had me do, but he won't forgive me a third time."

Duliana the Wise thought this over and decided that there was some sense in his words and that it might be easier for him to escape by himself, without her. She helped him get ready, and Ivanko rode away.



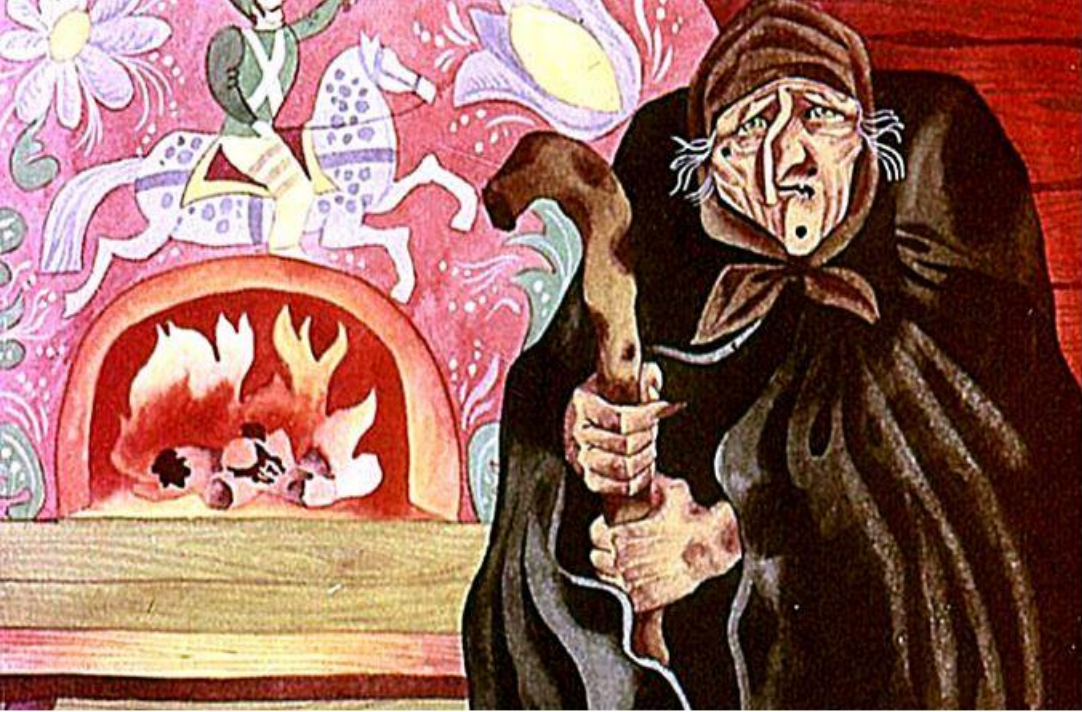
On and on he rode and after a time came to the house of the little old man with the beard that trailed over the ground.

"How have you been getting on, Grandpa?" he asked him.

"I am two hundred and fifty years old, my son, but never before was I so hungry," said the little old man. "Have you a crust of bread that you could give me?"

Ivanko got out a loaf of bread, cut it in two and held out one half to the little old man. Then he reached into his pocket, and, bringing out as many gold coins as he could hold in one hand, gave them to him.

"Thank you, my son, thank you kindly!" said the little old man. "Who knows! — perhaps I can do you a good turn too some day."



They bade each other goodbye, and Ivanko rode on.

By and by he came upon a large hut that stood in the middle of the forest. He stepped inside, and whom should he see there but an old witch!



"Good evening, Mother!" said he with a bow.

"Good evening to you, my son!" the witch replied.

"What brings you here?"

"I am looking for work."

"How would you like to work for me?" said the witch.

"I can take you on for two years. All you will have to do is pasture three white mares, but if they are not back in their stalls each day on the stroke of noon you will pay with your life for it!"



She baked him a sleeping bun and sent him off to work, and Ivanko drove the mares to a forest glade, ate a piece of the bun and fell fast asleep. While he slept the mares ran away and vanished in the forest.



All of a sudden who should come running up to him but the little old man with the long beard.

"Wake up, Ivanko!" he cried. "Your mares have changed into deer. But that is nothing! Give them three blows of your lash, and they will at once get back their proper shape."



Ivanko was home with the mares on the stroke of noon. He drove them to their stalls and went into the house where he found the witch busy sharpening a knife. But when she learned that the mares were back and safely in their stalls she grabbed the three iron rods that lay on the stove, rushed to the stable and beat them so hard that they leaped as high as the ceiling and smashed it with their hooves.

The next day Ivanko, who was wiser now and knew what to expect, did not so much as touch the sleeping bun but sat down on a mole hill and took care not to fall asleep. But the eldest of the three mares came up to him and sent her breath into his face, and he dropped off at once.



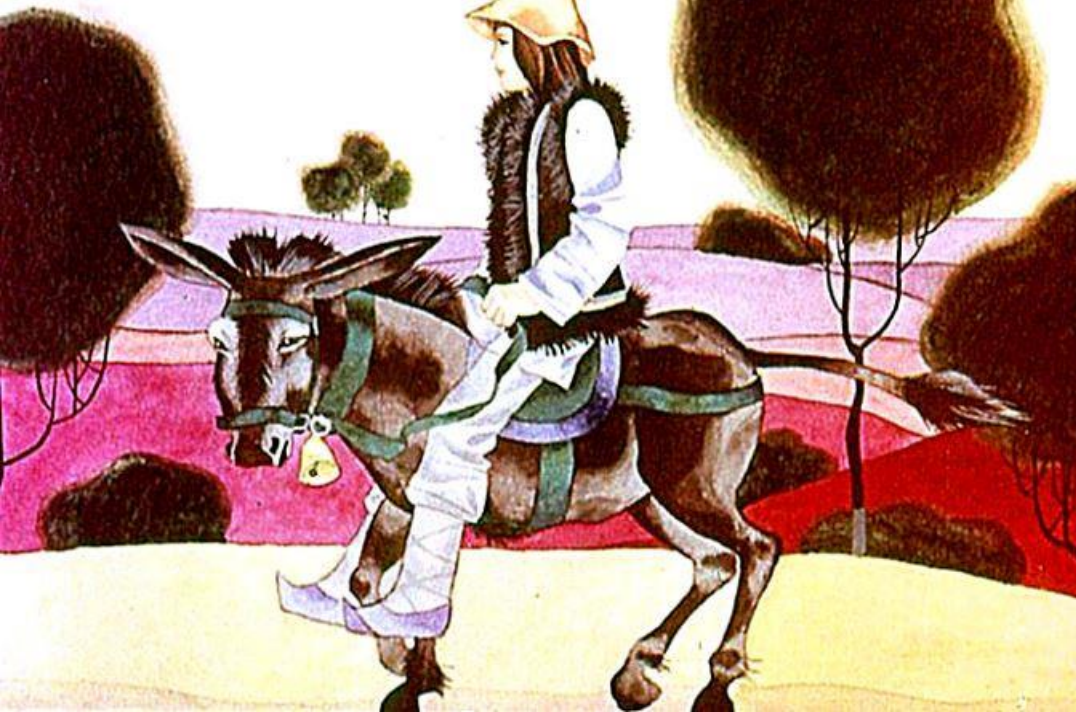
By and by who should come running up to him but the little old man with the long beard!

"Wake up, Ivanko!" he cried. "If you don't it'll be the end of you! The witch has driven the mares home, changed them into eggs, put a basket over them and seated herself on top of it. She is still sitting there and won't get up. So listen to me and do as I say. As soon as you step into the house I will turn into a fox and make for the attic where the witch keeps a golden cock. She will rush after me, and you must

lift the basket and strike the eggs with your lash. You'll see, they'll turn back into mares again at once!"

Ivanko thanked him, and as they were leaving the forest together, the little old man said again:

"A day counts for a year here, and two days for two years, so your term of service ends tonight. The witch will have to pay you and will offer you a beautiful maid and some gold and silver besides. Now, mind what I say. Take neither but ask for the donkey that you will see lying on a heap of dung and insist that you must have his saddle too, dirty as it is."



They came to the witch's house, and the little old man turned into a fox and went after the golden cock in the attic. At this the witch forgot about the eggs and rushed upstairs, and Ivanko lifted the basket, struck the eggs with his lash and changed them back into mares. The witch rushed down from the attic, took a knife and was about to cut off his head, but Ivanko said:

"Stop, Grandma, and calm yourself! The mares are back in their stalls."

The witch glanced under the basket, and lo! the eggs were gone. She ran to the stable but did not touch the mares this time and was soon out again with three lovely young girls. She told Ivanko to choose himself a bride from among them, but this he would not do and begged her to let him have the donkey that lay on a heap of dung in the yard.

"What a thing to ask for in return for having worked so hard!" said the witch. "The donkey's half dead! Why, you can have all the gold and silver you can carry."

But Ivanko insisted that he would have nothing but the donkey.



"Oh, very well," the witch said, and she told the three lovely young girls to plait a golden bridle for Ivanko for him to lead the donkey away.

"I don't need a golden bridle, Grandma," Ivanko said. "The old saddle that the chickens have been roosting on is good enough for me!"

He saddled the donkey, and away they rode, but so weak was it from having lain on the ground for so long that it could only move slowly.

"Look back, Ivanko, can the witch see us?" the donkey asked.

Ivanko looked back.

"She can!" he said. "She is up on the very top of the house and is watching us."

They crossed the forest and as soon as they were out of it the donkey shook himself three times and turned into a twelve-legged horse.

"Now we can go after your bride Duliana the Wise, Ivanko!" he said.



Ivanko got on his back, and the horse at once soared up to the sky, and it was only when the red seas showed below that he came down again. He bathed in the seas, his strength doubled, and before Ivanko could count to two there they were in front of the Devil of Devils' house. Duliana the Wise was on the twelfth floor and Ivanko seized her without getting off his horse's back and carried her off with him.

The Devil of Devils' horse neighed loudly, and the Devil of Devils came running.

"Is there time for me to eat ten pots of iron dumplings, drink twelve barrels of beer and smoke twenty boxes of cigars before we go after them?" he asked.

"We won't overtake them no matter what you do," the horse replied.

But this did not stop the Devil of Devils. Quick as lightning he jumped on the horse's back and away he rode after Ivanko and Duliana the Wise.

Ivanko felt the horse's breath burning him and moaned in pain, but his own horse called out:



"Hear me, O horse of the Devil of Devils, hear me, my brother! Leave the Devil of Devils and come with us! What do you get from him but iron dumplings to eat and cold water to drink, and we will give you oats and milk!"

The Devil of Devils' horse heard him, he rose to the clouds and turned over on his back, and the Devil of Devils fell to the ground and was killed. The horse flew up to Ivanko's horse, Duliana the Wise got on his back, and on they rode again. But all of a sudden who should come after them but the very witch Ivanko had worked for! She was mounted on a poker but was very quick for all that and had all but overtaken them when the little old man with the long beard flung himself down

on the road in front of her.

"Stop!" he called. "Can't you see the boundary line? You know you can't cross the border!"

And as you could not cross the border without permission in those days any more than you can today, the witch was forced to turn back.

And Ivanko brought his bride Duliana the Wise, who was as rich as she was fair, home to his mother.